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SPECIFICATION

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

SEMICONDUCTOR, MEMORY CARD, AND DATA PROCESSING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention is related to a
semiconductor device having a non-volatile storage
element capable of storing at least 4 values of
information (namely, 2 bits of information) into a
10 single memory cell, for example, an electrically
reprogrammable non-volatile semiconductor memory device
such as a flash memory, and furthermore, is related to
a technique effectively applicable to a data
processing system such as a file memory system with
15 using this non-volatile semiconductor memory device.

Conventionally, non-volatile semiconductor
storage devices such as flash memories have been
proposed. These storage devices are capable of
storing information by injecting and/or extracting
20 electrons with respect to floating gates. A flash
memory owns a memory cell transistor having a floating
gate, a control gate, a source, and a drain. In this
memory cell transistor, when electrons are injected
into the floating gate, a threshold voltage would be
25 increased, whereas when electrons are extracted from

the floating gate, the threshold voltage would be decreased. The memory cell transistor may store therein information in response to the higher/lower threshold voltages with respect to a word line voltage (namely, voltage applied to control gate) used to read out data. Although not having restriction intentions, the lower threshold voltage condition of the memory cell transistor will be referred to as an "erasing state", and the higher threshold voltage condition thereof will be referred to as a "writing state" in this specification.

Among these flash memories, such a flash memory is available that information having more than 4 values can be stored in a single memory transistor. For example, such multi-level memories are described in Japanese Publication "NIKKEI MICRODEVICE" issued in November, 1994, pages 48 to 49, and further Japanese laid-opened Patent Application No.9-297996/1997 opened in 1997.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In a multi-level memory, for example, if a selection can be made of one state from an erasing state and first to third writing states whose threshold voltages are different from each other with respect to this erasing state, then information having

four values can be stored in a single memory cell transistor. If an erasing operation is carried out before a writing operation, then information having four values can be stored by determining that all of the first to third writing states is not selectable, or any one of the first to third programming states is selected. In this programming operation, such program control information is required so as to determine as to whether or not the programming operations are selected in order to separately obtain the first programming state through the third programming state. To save such program control information, a sense latch circuit and a data latch circuit, provided on each of bit lines, may be employed.

A sense latch circuit is constructed of, for example, a static latch. One end of each of bit lines is connected to a pair of input/output terminals of this sense latch circuit, and a drain of the above-described memory cell transistor is connected to each of these bit lines. Moreover, a data latch circuit is connected to the other end of each of bit lines. When either a readout voltage or a verify (verification) voltage is applied to a control gate of the memory cell transistor, the above-described sense latch circuit senses as to whether or not a current may flow

through the source-to-drain path. At this time, the bit line provided on one operation non-selected side of the sense latch circuit is precharged to a reference level. Also, when data is written by forming
5 a high potential difference between the control gate of the memory cell transistor and the drain thereof, the drain voltage is increased, or decreased every memory cell, so that it is possible to discriminate the program selection to the memory cell from the
10 program non-selection to the memory cell. In this case, the sense latch circuit latches the data in correspondence with the program selection, and the program non-selection. This latched data corresponds to the above-explained program control information.

15 Such program control information is produced via a data converting circuit every 2 bits of externally supplied program data, and then is latched by the sense latch circuit of the program-selected bit line and by each of the data latch circuits for the bit
20 line pair which commonly use this sense latch circuit. In the case that the programming operation is carried out in unit of a word line, the program control information is previously latched into the above-described sense latch circuit and data latch circuit
25 as to all of bit lines. Which commonly use the word

line.

In the programing operation, a decision is first made as to whether or not the memory cell is brought into the first program state in accordance with the
5 program control information latched by the sense latch circuit. Next, another decision is made as to whether or not the memory cell is brought into the second program state in accordance with the program control information which has been internally transferred from
10 one data latch circuit to the sense latch circuit. Moreover, a further decision is made as to whether or not the memory cell is brought into the third program state in accordance with the program control information which has been internally transferred from
15 the other data latch circuit to the sense latch circuit. In this manner, the information having the four values specified by the 2-bit data can be stored into a single memory cell. In the above-explained programing operations from the first programing state
20 to the third programing state, such a verify operation is carried out as to whether or not the threshold voltage of the memory cell reaches the threshold voltage allocated to each of the first to third programing states.

25 At this time, there is such a memory cell which

is brought into an overprogramming state among these memory cells with respect to each of the first to third programming states. In this memory cell, the threshold voltages under preceding/succeeding programming states cannot be discriminated from each other. For instance, the threshold voltage of the memory cell of the first programming state becomes high, which cannot be discriminated from the threshold voltage of the second programming state. In such a case, in order to retry the programming operation from the beginning stage, after the erasing operation is carried out with respect to the memory cell to be written, the above-explained programming operation is retried.

However, when the programming operations from the first programming state to the third programming state are once carried out, the program control information which has been first latched into the sense latch circuit would be overwritten by another program control information internally transferred from the data latch circuit to thereby disappear. As a result, when the reprogramming operation is performed due to the overprogramming operation, the same program data must be again received from the external device. To this end, the control circuit for access-controlling

the flash memory must save the program data in a work memory or the like for the time being after the programing operation is carried out with respect to the flash memory. Thus, the work load for access-
5 controlling the flash memory would also be increased. The Inventors could reveal that this fact may lower the access efficiency of the flash memory, or the data processing efficiency.

Furthermore, in such a case that the programing
10 operation itself will finally fail due to the failure operation of the reprograming operation caused by the overprograming operation, it is imaginable that the program data existed in this failure programing operation is stored into another storage area of this
15 flash memory, or another flash memory. Similar to the previous case, the flash memory related to this failure programing operation can no longer save the program data at this time. As a consequence, also in this failure case, the control circuit for access-
20 controlling the flash memory must save the program data in a work memory or the like for the time being after the programing operation for this flash memory. Thus, this fact may lower the access efficiency of the flash memory, or the data processing efficiency.

25 An object of the present invention is to provide

a semiconductor device in which program data is not
lost by a programing operation, and this program data
is externally supplied to a data latch circuit in
order to program information having multi-levels to
5 the respective memory cells.

Another object of the present invention is to
provide a semiconductor device which is no longer
required to again receive the externally supplied
program data in such a case that a programing
10 operation of multi-level information is retried with
respect to a memory cell.

A further object of the present invention is to
provide such a semiconductor device that when a
programing operation is accomplished under abnormal
15 condition, the program data which has been internally
saved at the end of this abnormal programing operation
can be rewritten by designating another memory
address.

A still further object of the present invention
20 is to provide a semiconductor device that when a
programing operation is accomplished under abnormal
condition, the program data related to the end of this
abnormal programing operation can be outputted outside
this semiconductor device.

25 The above-described objects and other objects,

and also novel features of the present invention may be apparent from a detailed description of the present specification and the accompanying drawings.

The typically disclosed invention will now be
5 summarized as follows:

[1] A semiconductor device, according to a first aspect of the present invention, is featured by that in a semiconductor device capable of storing information having multi-levels into a single
10 electrically erasable/programmable non-volatile memory cell, in such a case that an overprogram state of the memory cell is detected by performing an overprogram detecting operation (either word disturb detection or erratic detection) in connection with a programing
15 operation, even when the programing operation is retried by again performing the erasing operation, internal saving of the program data required for the programing operation can be guaranteed.

In other words, the semiconductor device is
20 constituted by a sense latch circuit having one pair of input/output terminals; bit lines provided in correspondence with the respective input/output terminals of the sense latch circuit; a plurality of electrically erasable/programmable non-volatile memory
25 cells selectively connected to the bit lines; a data

latch circuit coupled to each of the bit lines;
input/output means capable of interfacing the data
latch circuit with an external device; and control
means for controlling data reading/erasing/programing
5 operations with respect to the memory cell. The
control means causes the data latch circuit to save
externally supplied program data; produces program
control information every time the data programing
operation is carried out; and causes the latch circuit
10 to latch the produced program control information for
determining that the non-volatile memory cell is
brought into any state of different threshold
voltages, the non-volatile memory cell being selected
to be connected to the bit line based upon the program
15 data having plural bits saved in the data latch
circuit.

In accordance with the above-explained control
means, the externally supplied program data is latched
into the data latch circuits, and a judgment is
20 carried out as to whether or not the latched program
data corresponds to which threshold value of the
multi-levels every time the programing operation of
the plural stages is performed. Then, the program
control information control corresponding to this
25 judgment result is latched into the sense latch

5 circuit. In response to the program information
latched in the sense latch circuit, the programing
operation for setting the threshold voltages of the
multi-levels to the memory cell is carried out in a
stepwise manner. As a consequence, even when the
programing operation is accomplished, the program data
which has been originally and externally supplied is
left in the data latch circuits. Accordingly, even
when the programing operation of the multi-levels
10 information with respect to the memory cell is carried
out again based upon the detection result of the word
disturb detecting operation, or the detection result
of the erratic detecting operation, the program data
is no longer again accepted from the external devices.

15 To detect the overprograming state, the following
method may be employed. That is to say, the above-
described control means furthermore judges as to
whether or not a threshold voltage which should be set
to a memory cell is equal to a threshold voltage
20 corresponding to such a threshold voltage to be
checked by an overprogram detection every time a
verify reading operation required for the overprogram
detection is performed by calculating the data latched
by the data latch circuit; the control means causes
25 the sense latch circuit to latch the judgment result;

in the case that the judgment result data latched in the sense latch circuit means the corresponding threshold voltage, the control means precharges the bit line; and the control means checks as to whether
5 or not the precharge state of the bit line is changed by the verify reading operation to thereby detect the overprogramming state.

The above-explained control means can retry the programming operation after retrying the erasing
10 operation when the overprogramming state is detected.

[2] The present invention, according to a second aspect, is directed to a more concrete calculating/controlling means. The calculating/controlling means according to the first
15 aspect is employed so as to latch the program information into the sense latch circuit. In accordance with this second aspect, another semiconductor device is conceived which is capable of storing information having four values into a single
20 electrically erasable/programmable non-volatile memory cell by controlling the non-volatile memory cell to be brought into any one of an erasing state, a first programming state, a second programming state, and a third programming state, the threshold voltages of
25 which are different from each other. At this time,

the control means causes the data latch circuit to save externally supplied program data; calculates program control information capable of determining that a non-volatile memory cell selectively connected to the bit line is brought into any one of the erasing state, the first programing state; the second programing state, and the third state while using 2-bit program data as a unit, the 2-bit program data being saved by two data latch circuits connected to the one pair of bit lines for commonly using the sense latch circuit; causes the sense latch circuit to latch the calculated control information every time a programing operation is performed; and controls the first programing state to the third programing state in accordance with the latched programing control information.

Concretely speaking, when the sense latch circuit latches program control information for setting as a first logic value, output data on the side of a memory cell connection selecting bit line, the control means causes the memory cell connected to the bit line set as the first logic value to execute the programing operation. The program control information is calculated by the control means in such a manner that with respect to a first program data bit latched in

the data latch circuit provided on the side of one
memory cell connection selecting bit line and also a
second program data bit latched in the data latch
circuit provided on the side of the other memory cell
5 connection non-selecting bit line, both the memory
cell connection selecting bit lines commonly using the
sense latch circuit, an OR gating operation between
logically inverted data of the first program data bit
and the second program data bit; another OR gating
10 operation between the first program data bit and the
second program data bit; and another OR gating
operation between the first program data bit and
logically inverted data of the second program data bit
are carried out based upon the bit line precharge
15 operation by the data latched in the data latch
circuits and also the sense operation by the sense
latch circuit; and every time the programing operation
is performed, the control means causes the sense latch
circuit to latch the OR-gated values sequentially
20 acquired by said OR-gating operations; and causes such
a memory cell of the memory cell connection selecting
bit line in which the latched OR-gated value becomes
the first logic value to perform the programing
operation.

25 The above-described means for judging the

overprograming state may be realized by the following more concrete example. The control means furthermore judges as to whether or not a threshold voltage which should be set to a memory cell is equal to a threshold
5 voltage corresponding to such a threshold voltage to be checked by an overprogram detection every time a verify reading operation required for the overprogram detection due to the programing operation is performed by calculating the data latched by the data latch
10 circuit; the control means causes the sense latch circuit to latch the judgment result; in the case that the judgment result data latched in the sense latch circuit means the corresponding threshold voltage, the control means precharges the bit line; and the control
15 means checks as to whether or not the precharge state of the bit line is changed by the verify reading operation to thereby detect the overprograming state. The judging calculation is performed by the control means in such a manner that with respect to a first
20 program data bit latched in the data latch circuit provided on the side of one memory cell connection selecting bit line and also a second program data bit latched in the data latch circuit provided on the side of the other memory cell connection non-selecting bit
25 line, both the memory cell connection selecting bit

lines commonly using the sense latch circuit, a negative logic OR gating operation between the first program data bit and the second program data bit; an AND gating operation between the first program data bit and logically inverted data of the second program data bit; and another AND gating operation between the first program data bit and the second program data bit are carried out based upon the bit line precharge operation by the data latched in the data latch circuits and also the sense operation by the sense latch circuit. Every time the overprogramming detection operation is performed, the control means causes the sense latch circuit to latch as the judgment result data the negative logic OR-gated value and the AND-gated values sequentially acquired from the calculations; and when the sense latch circuit latches such judging result data that the output data on the side of the memory cell connection selecting bit line is equal to a second logic value, the control means precharges the memory cell connection selecting bit line via the precharge circuit.

[3] Even when the programming operation fails, the program data at this time is saved inside the semiconductor device by the above means. While paying an attention to this fact, in the case that the retry

program command is accepted after the failure
programing operation has been accomplished, the
control circuit can program the program data already
saved in the data latch circuits at the address
5 supplied in connection with this retry program
command. Since the semiconductor device owns such a
retry function, the memory controller, or the control
apparatus for access-controlling this semiconductor
device changes either the program address or the
10 sector address with respect to the semiconductor
device in which the programing operation has failed,
so that the memory controller, or the control
apparatus can perform the reprograming operation.

Also, after the programing operation has been
15 accomplished under abnormal condition, the subject to
be rewritten may be changed into another semiconductor
device. In this case, when the control circuit
receives the recovery read command after the
programing operation has failed, the control circuit
20 outputs the program data saved in the data latch
circuits DLL and DLR via the input/output means to the
external device. Due to this recovery function, the
control apparatus can readily reprogram the same data
into another semiconductor device other than such a
25 semiconductor device where the programing operation

has failed. This control apparatus access-controls either the memory controller of the memory card, or the memory card constituted by the plurality of semiconductor devices.

5 [4] The reprogramming operation may be performed in such a manner that after the erasing operation is carried out by the erase command, the programming operation is performed with respect to the same area by the program command. Such a reprogramming process
10 operation may be realized by a single command, namely one reprogram command. The above-described control means is operated as follows. When the first reprogram command is supplied, the reprogram address is fetched, and also the program data is fetched by
15 the data latch circuit. After the second reprogram command is supplied, the area designated by the reprogram address is erased. Subsequently, the programming operation is controlled based upon the data saved in the data latch circuits. As a result, all of
20 the data of a sector can be rewritten by way of a single command.

Also, data reprogramming for a portion of a sector may be realized by a single command. That is to say, when a first reprogram command is supplied, the
25 control means fetches a reprogram address and saves

data of the fetched address into the data latch
circuit; the control means designates a reprogram
address within a range of the reprogram address after
saving the data of the fetched address so as to latch
5 the program data into the data latch circuit; after a
second reprogram command is supplied, the control
means erases the program data of the sector area
designated by the reprogram address; and subsequently,
the control means controls the programming operation
10 based upon the data saved in the data latch circuit
and stored at the sector area designated by the
reprogram address.

[5] In the case that a semiconductor device is
utilized as a file memory, while a management area is
15 allocated to a sector of this semiconductor device,
the remaining portion thereof may be opened as a user
area. For example, information related to
reprogramming times and failure/good sectors is stored
into the management area. While data is erased in
20 unit of a sector by a user, such a command for
automatically setting the management area out of
erasing operation is supported. As a result, the
semiconductor device and furthermore the file memory
can be made more convenient. In view of this point, a
25 partial erasing command may be supported. In other

words, when a first partial erasing command is
supplied, the control means acquires a sector address;
next, when a second partial erasing command is
supplied, the control means saves data of a
5 predetermined area into a data latch circuit
corresponding to the predetermined area within an area
designated by the sector address and also sets data
indicative of an erasing state to a data latch circuit
corresponding to other areas within the area
10 designated by the sector address; and furthermore,
after the control means performs the erasing operation
with respect to the area designated by the sector
address, the control means executes the program
control operation in accordance with the data set to
15 the data latch circuit.

[6] A memory card may be realized by packaging on a
card board, the semiconductor device, a memory
controller for access-controlling the semiconductor
device, and an external interface circuit connected to
20 the memory controller. Also, a data processing system
may be arranged by comprising the semiconductor
device, a memory controller for access-controlling the
semiconductor device, and a processor for controlling
the memory controller.

25 While paying an attention to a retry programing

command, a data processing system may be arranged by comprising the semiconductor device, and a control apparatus for outputting both a retry program command and a program address to the semiconductor-device when the control apparatus detects that a programming operation by the semiconductor device is accomplished under failure state. Also, while paying an attention to a recovery read command, a data processing system is arranged by comprising the semiconductor device, and further a control apparatus for outputting a recovery read command to the semiconductor device when the control apparatus detects that a programming operation by the semiconductor device is accomplished under failure state, and also for capturing program data outputted from the semiconductor device to which the recovery read command is supplied, and further for controlling to program the fetched program data into another semiconductor device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Fig. 1 is a schematic block diagram for representing an overall flash memory 1, according to a first embodiment of the present invention, capable of reading/programming 2 bits of information from/into a single memory cell;

Fig. 2 illustratively indicates a device of an

example of a memory cell transistor;

Fig. 3 is an explanatory diagram for showing an example of a command of the flash memory;

Fig. 4 is an explanatory diagram for indicating
5 an example of a corresponding relationship between contents of the respective bits of a status register and input/output terminals I/00 to I/07;

Fig. 5 illustratively represents an example of a connection relationship among a data latch circuit, a
10 bit line, and a sense latch circuit contained in a memory array;

Fig. 6 is a explanatory diagram for showing an example of a corresponding relationship between the data latch circuit and the input/output terminals I/04
15 and I/00;

Fig. 7 illustratively shows as a threshold voltage distribution diagram, a relationship between 4 values of data and threshold voltages;

Fig. 8 is an explanatory diagram for showing an
20 example of a programing voltage condition and a sector batch-erasing condition;

Fig. 9 is an explanatory diagram for explicitly showing various programing modes in a 4-value programing process;

25 Fig. 10 is a circuit diagram for indicating an

example of a structure of the flash memory, which mainly shows a sense latch circuit and a data latch circuit;

Fig. 11 is a circuit diagram for showing an
5 example of an AND type memory mat;

Fig. 12 is a circuit diagram for representing an example of a NOR type memory mat;

Fig. 13 is a circuit diagram for indicating an example of a DiNOR type memory mat;

10 Fig. 14 is a circuit diagram for showing an example of a NAND type memory mat;

Fig. 15 is a circuit diagram for representing an example of a HiCR type memory mat;

15 Fig. 16 is a flow chart for describing an example of a programing operation designated by a first command (1FH) and a second command (40H);

Fig. 17 is an explanatory diagram for schematically showing a "01" programing process operation TS1;

20 Fig. 18 is an explanatory diagram for schematically showing a "00" programing process operation TS2;

Fig. 19 is an explanatory diagram for schematically showing a "10" programing process
25 operation TS3;

Fig. 20 is an explanatory diagram for indicating an erratic/disturb detecting process operation TS4;

Fig. 21 is an explanatory diagram for theoretically showing an example of a calculation content of a data latch processing operation;

Fig. 22 is an explanatory diagram for indicating a logic value of a calculation result with respect to logic values of data bits A and B in the case that the calculation logic shown in Fig. 21 is employed;

Fig. 23 is a flow chart for describing a detailed content of the "01" programing process operation TS1;

Fig. 24 is a flow chart for describing a detailed content of the "10" erratic detecting process operation;

Fig. 25 is an explanatory diagram for indicating an example of a "01" program data latch processing operation by the multi-sense method;

Fig. 26 is an explanatory diagram for representing an example of a "00" program data latch processing operation by the multi-sense method;

Fig. 27 is an explanatory diagram for indicating an example of a "10" program data latch processing operation by the multi-sense method;

Fig. 28 is an explanatory diagram for representing an example of a "00" erratic detection

data latch processing operation by the multi-sense method;

Fig. 29 is an explanatory diagram for indicating an example of a "10" erratic detection data latch processing operation by the multi-sense method;

Fig. 30 is an explanatory diagram for representing an example of a "11" disturb detection data latch processing operation by the multi-sense method;

Fig. 31 is an explanatory diagram for showing a first detailed operation of a program bias application process operation S11 in the programing operation;

Fig. 32 is an explanatory diagram for indicating a final detailed operation of a program bias application process operation S11 in the programing operation;

Fig. 33 is an explanatory diagram for showing a detailed bit line precharge operation in a VWV 3 verify process operation;

Fig. 34 is an explanatory diagram for representing a detailed memory discharge operation in the VWV 3 verify process operation;

Fig. 35 is an explanatory diagram for showing a detailed precharge operation for a sense latching operation in the VWV 3 verify process operation;

Fig. 36 is an explanatory diagram for showing a detailed sense latch operation in the VWV 3 verify process operation;

Fig. 37 is an explanatory diagram for
5 representing a detailed all judgment operation in the VWV 3 verify process operation;

Fig. 38 is a timing chart for showing an example of operation timing in the program data latch processing operation;

10 Fig. 39 is a timing chart for representing an example of programing operation timing;

Fig. 40 is a timing chart for showing an example of operation timing in the program verify processing operation;

15 Fig. 41 is a timing chart for representing an example of all judging operation timing;

Fig. 42 is an explanatory diagram for explanatorily indicating "01" program data latch processing operation by the multi-power supply method;

20 Fig. 43 is an explanatory diagram for explanatorily showing "00" program data latch processing operation by the multi-power supply method;

Fig. 44 is an explanatory diagram for explanatorily representing "10" program data latch
25 processing operation by the multi-power supply method;

Fig. 45 is an explanatory diagram for
explanatorily indicating "00" erratic detection data
latch processing operation by the multi-power supply
method;

5 Fig. 46 is an explanatory diagram for
explanatorily showing "10" erratic detection data
latch processing operation by the multi-power supply
method;

10 Fig. 47 is an explanatory diagram for
explanatorily representing "11" disturb detection data
latch processing operation by the multi-power supply
method;

15 Fig. 48 shows an operation waveform chart of "01"
program data latch processing operation by the multi-
power supply method;

Fig. 49 indicates an operation waveform chart of
"00" program data latch processing operation by the
multi-power supply method;

20 Fig. 50 represents an operation waveform chart of
"10" program data latch processing operation by the
multi-power supply method;

Fig. 51 shows an operation waveform chart of "00"
erratic detection data latch processing operation by
the multi-power supply method;

25 Fig. 52 indicates an operation waveform chart of

"10" erratic detection data latch processing operation
by the multi-power supply method;

Fig. 53 represents an operation waveform chart of
"11" disturb detection data latch processing operation
5 by the multi-power supply method;

Fig. 54 is an operation explanatory diagram for
indicating various operation modes of the flash memory
in connection with various voltage conditions;

Fig. 55 is a flow chart for indicating an example
10 of a retry program function;

Fig. 56 is a flow chart for representing an
example of a recovery function;

Fig. 57 shows a stage transition diagram for
representing internal operations of the flash memory
15 having the retry function and the recovery function;

Fig. 58 is a schematic block diagram for
indicating an example of a memory card with using the
flash memory;

Fig. 59 is a schematic block diagram for
20 indicating an example of a data processing system with
using the flash memory;

Fig. 60 is an explanatory diagram for explaining
a concept of the retry function and the recovery
function;

25 Fig. 61 is a flow chart for describing an example

of a process operation by receiving a reprogram
command;

Fig. 62 is a flow chart for describing an example
of a process operation by receiving a reprogram
5 command used to reprogram data with respect to a
portion of a sector;

Fig. 63 is a flow chart for describing another
example of a process operation by receiving a
reprogram command used to reprogram data with respect
10 to a portion of a sector;

Fig. 64 is a flow chart for explaining an example
of a partial erase function;

Fig. 65 is an explanatory diagram for showing a
detailed front half operation of a designated sector
15 data reading operation of Fig. 64;

Fig. 66 is an explanatory diagram for indicating
a detailed rear half operation of the designated
sector data reading operation of Fig. 64; and

Fig. 67 represents a relationship between a word
20 line selecting level used to read designated sector
data and a threshold voltage distribution.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF FLASH MEMORY

In Fig. 1, there is shown an overall structure of
25 a flash memory 1 according to a first embodiment mode

of the present invention. In this flash memory 1, 2 bits of information, or 2-bit data are programable in a single memory cell, and furthermore the 2-bit data are readable from this single memory cell.

5 Reference numeral 3 shows a memory array containing a memory mat, a data latch circuit, and a sense latch circuit. The memory mat 3 contains a large number of electrically erasable/programable non-volatile memory cell transistors. For instance, as
10 represented in Fig. 2, a memory cell transistor is constituted by employing a source "S" and a drain "D" formed in either a semiconductor substrate or a memory well "SUB"; a floating gate "FG" formed via a tunnel oxide film in a channel region; and also a control
15 gate "CG" overlapped via an interlayer insulating film on the floating gate. The control gate CG is connected to a word line 6, the drain D is connected to a bit line 5, and the source S is connected to a source line (not shown in this drawing).

20 External input/output terminals I/00 to I/07 are commonly used as an address input terminal, a data input terminal, a data output terminal, and a command input terminal. X address signals inputted from the external input/output terminals I/00 to I/07 are
25 supplied via a multiplexer 7 to an X address buffer 8.

An X address decoder 9 decodes an internal complementary address signal output from the X address buffer 8 to drive the word line.

5 A sense latch circuit (not shown) is provided on one terminal side of the above-described bit line 5, and a data latch circuit (not shown either) is provided on the other terminal side of this bit line 5. In response to a selection signal outputted from a Y address decoder 11, the bit line 5 is selected by a
10 Y gate array circuit 13. Y address signals entered from the external input/output terminals I/00 to I/07 are preset to a Y address counter 12, and Y address signals which are sequentially incremented while starting from a preset value are supplied to the Y
15 address decoder 11.

A bit line selected by the Y gate array circuit 13 is conducted to an input terminal of an output buffer 15 when data is outputted, whereas this bit line is connected via a data control circuit 16 to an
20 output terminal of an input buffer 17 when data is inputted. The connections between the output buffer 15, the input buffer 17, and the input/output terminals I/00 to I/07 are controlled by the multiplexer 7. Commands supplied from the
25 input/output terminals I/00 to I/07 are supplied via

the multiplexer 7 and the input buffer 17 to a mode control circuit 18. The above-explained data control circuit 16 may supply data of a logic value defined under control of the mode control circuit 18 to the
5 memory array 3 in addition to the data supplied from the input/output terminals I/00 to I/07.

To a control signal buffer circuit 19, a chip enable signal CEB, an output enable signal OEB, a program enable signal WEB, a serial clock signal SC, a
10 reset signal RESB, and a command enable signal CDEB are supplied as an access control signal. The mode control circuit 18 controls a signal interface function with respect to an external circuit in response to states of these signals, and also controls
15 an internal operation in accordance with a command code. In the case that a command, or data is entered to the input/output terminals I/00 to I/07, the command enable signal CDEB is asserted. When a command is inputted into the input/output terminals, the
20 program enable signal WEB is furthermore asserted. When data is entered to the input/output terminals, the program enable signal WEB is negated. When an address is inputted, the command enable signal CDEB is negated, and the program enable signal WEB is
25 asserted. As a result, the mode control circuit 18

can discriminate the command, the data, and the address entered from the external input/output terminals I/00 to I/07 in a multiplex manner. While the erasing operation and the programing operation are performed, the mode control circuit 18 can assert ready/busy signals R/Bb and can notify this condition to the external circuit.

The internal power supply circuit 20 produces various sorts of operation power supply voltages 21 used to execute programing/erase-verifying/reading operations, and then supplies these operation power supply voltages to the X address decoder 9 and the memory cell array 3.

In response to a command, the mode control circuit 18 controls the overall arrangement of the flash memory 1. It should be noted that operations of the flash memory 1 are basically determined by commands.

Commands allocated to the flash memory 1 are exemplified in Fig. 3. That is, there are a read command, a recovery read command, an erase command, a program command, an additional program command, a retry program command, a partial erase command, and a reprogram command. In this drawing, a command code is expressed by the hexadecimal notation. Among the

commands related to the reading operation (namely, read command, and recovery read command), and also the commands related to the programing operation, such a command (retry program command) to which the program data need not be supplied is constituted by a first
5 command, and other commands are constituted by the first command and a second command. The contents of the respective commands will be described in detail.

The flash memory 1 contains a status register 180
10 used to indicate an internal status, or conditions of this flash memory 1. The content of the status register 180 can be read out via the input/output terminals I/00 to I/07 by asserting the output enable signal OEB. Fig. 4 shows a relationship between the
15 contents of the respective bits of the status register 180 and the input/output terminals I/00 to I/07.

Fig. 5 represents a relationship between the data latch circuits and the sense latch circuits contained in the memory array 3. An array SLA of the sense
20 latch circuit SL is arranged at a center of this drawing. A switch circuit/calculating circuit array 30L, a memory mat MML, another switch circuit/calculating circuit array 31L, and an array DLLA of an upper digit data latch circuit DLL are
25 arranged on the side of one input/output node of the

sense latch circuit SL. Similarly, a switch
circuit/calculating circuit array 30R, a memory mat
MMR, another switch circuit/calculating circuit array
31R, and an array DLRA of a lower digit data latch
5 circuit DLR are arranged on the side of the other
input/output node of the sense latch circuit SL.
Furthermore, as shown in Fig. 5, when a structure is
tried to be grasped while giving an attention to a
pair of bit line, the data latch circuits DLL and DLR
10 are provided via bit lines G-BLL and G-BLR at one pair
of data input/output nodes SLL and SLR of a static
latching type sense latch circuit SL. Both the data
latch circuits DLL and DLR can latch program data bits
supplied via the Y gate array circuit 13. In
15 accordance with this example, since the flash memory 1
owns the 8-bit input/output terminals I/00 to I/07,
the program data can be set to four pairs of bit lines
of the data latch circuits DLL and DLR by entering the
program data 1 time. As represented in the
20 correspondence relationship between the data latch
circuits DLL/DLR and the input/output terminals I/04,
I/00 shown in Fig. 6, the modes of the data set are
made constant. In this explanation, since the unit of
the programming operation is set to the unit of the
25 word line, after the program data have been set to the

data latch circuits DLL and DLR, the programing operation is carried out by applying the programing voltages. These data latch circuits DLL and DLR are related to the bit line of all of the memory cells in
5 which selection terminals are coupled to one word line.

In the multi-level information storage technique realized by the flash memory 1 shown in Fig. 1, an information storage state of a single memory cell is
10 selected to be one of an erase state ("11"), a first program state ("10"), a second program state ("00"), and a third program state ("01"). Four sets of these information storage states in total are such states determined by 2-bit data. In other words, such 2-bit
15 data is stored into a single memory cell. A relationship between the data having four values and threshold voltages is indicated as in a threshold voltage distribution diagram of Fig. 7.

To achieve the threshold value distribution as
20 indicated in Fig. 7, 3 different sorts of program verify voltages are set which are applied to the word line during the programing operation. Then, these three program verify voltages are sequentially switched, and the programing operations are carried
25 out three times in the separate manner. In Fig. 7,

symbols VWV1, VWV2, and VWV3 are program verify voltages employed when the first program state, the second program state, and the third program state are obtained, respectively.

5 Fig. 8 indicates an example of voltage applying conditions for the word line and the bit line during each of the three different programming operations. A voltage of 0 V is applied to a selected bit line, and a voltage of 6 V is applied to a non-selected bit line
10 during a programming operation. Although the present invention is not limited to this example, for instance, a voltage of 17 V is applied to the word line. The longer the application time of the high program voltage is applied, the higher the threshold
15 voltage of the memory cell is increased. The three sorts of program threshold voltages may be controlled by controlling the duration time of such high voltage conditions, and furthermore by controlling the level of the high voltage applied to the word line.

20 Whether 0 V, or 6 V is applied to the bit line may be determined based upon a logic value of program control information latched by the sense latch circuit SL. The program control information may be controlled in such a manner that when the data latched by the
25 sense latch circuit SL owns the logic value of "1",

the programing operation is not selected, whereas when the data latched by the sense latch circuit SL owns the logic value of "0", the programing operation is selected in the side of the programing operation
5 selected memory mat (a detailed control operation thereof will be explained later). It should also be noted that a precharge circuit is contained in the above-explained switch circuit/calculating circuit. This precharge circuit is operated in such a way that
10 when the data latched in the sense latch circuit is "1" and also 6 V is applied to the bit line, the bit line is previously precharged. As described above, since the bit line is precharged by the precharge circuit in advance, a peak current produced when 6 V
15 is applied to the bit line can be reduced.

The latching operation of the program control information with respect to the sense latch circuit is controlled every time each of the three programing operations is carried out. This program control is
20 performed by the mode control circuit 18. At this time, the program control information which should be latched by the sense latch circuit SL is produced by performing a calculation with using the program data bits saved by the data latch circuits DLL and DLR
25 every programing operation. The produced program

control information is latched by the sense latch circuit SL. For example, as indicated in Fig. 6, assuming now that the program data latched by the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is "01", this "01" state
5 corresponds to the third program state (see Fig. 7). The program operation which has been subdivided into three program operations after the erase state --- ??? . In the case that such a programing sequence is employed so as to produce the program states in the
10 order of the lower threshold voltages such as a second mode (Case 2) of Fig. 9, a calculation result by employing the program data ("01") of the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is set to a logic value "1" during the programing operation executed to obtain the
15 first program state in the first time; a calculation result by employing the program data ("01") of the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is set to a logic value "1" during the programing operation executed to obtain the second program state in the second time;
20 and a calculation result by employing the program data ("01") of the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is set to a logic value "0" during the programing operation executed to obtain the third program state in the third time. Such a calculation is performed by
25 activating the above-described switch

circuit/calculating circuit. As a consequence, the program voltage is applied only during the third programing operation, so that the third program state ("01") within the four values can be realized in this
5 memory cell.

As previously explained, when the programing operations are carried out in the three different times, the program data which is firstly latched by the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is not destroyed,
10 but may be maintained. This is because the following control sequence is employed. That is, the 2-bit program data latched by the data latch circuits DLL and DLR are used to be calculated every time the programing operation is carried out, and then the
15 calculated results are set to the sense latch circuit SL every time the calculation is carried out.

It should also be noted that the order for changing the threshold voltage during the programing operation is not limited to the second state (Case 2) shown in Fig. 9, but may be modified. For example, as
20 in the first mode (Case 1), the higher threshold voltage may be firstly set. Also, as in the third mode (Case 3), the changing rates of the threshold voltages obtained in a single programing operation may
25 be made equal to each other as to any of the program

states. Alternatively, the threshold voltages may be controlled as in the fourth mode (Case 4), or the fifth mode (Case 5).

When data is read out, three sorts of voltages
5 are set as word line selection levels which are applied to the word line. While these three sorts of word line selection levels are sequentially changed, the reading operations are performed three times. The data having two values (namely, 1 bit data) which is
10 read from the memory cell during each of the reading operations is latched by the sense latch circuit 4. Every time the data is latched, such a calculation is carried out that the sense-latched content is reflected onto the 2-bit information of the data latch
15 circuit. The 2 bits acquired in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR as a result of the sense latching operations executed 3 times are set as data corresponding to the information having the 4 values saved in this memory cell.

20 DETAILED STRUCTURE OF MEMORY ARRAY

Next, a detailed structure of the above-explained memory array will now be explained. Fig. 10 shows an example of a circuit arrangement of the above-explained flash memory 1 which is mainly arranged by a
25 sense latch circuit and a data latch circuit. As

apparent from Fig. 10, circuit arrangements located in the vicinity of right/left bit lines G-BLR/G-BLL of the sense latch circuit SL are made of mirror-symmetrical structures while positioning the sense latch circuit SL as a center.

Memory mats MML and MMR contain a plurality of electrically programable memory cells MC (several memory cells are typically indicated). As indicated in Fig. 2, one memory cell MC is constituted by a single electrically programable transistor (memory cell transistor) having a control gate, a floating gate, a source and a drain. Although not limited to this example, a layout structure of a memory cell is a so-called "AND" type memory structure. As exemplified on the side of the memory mat MMR, in the AND type structure, a plurality of the above-described memory cell transistors are arranged in a parallel manner via the respective diffusion layers (semiconductor regions) which commonly constitute a source and a drain. The diffusion layer which constitutes the drain is coupled via a selection transistor M1 to the bit line G-BLR, and the diffusion layer which constitutes the source is coupled via another selection transistor M2 to a common source line VMMR. The AND type memory cell structure will be discussed

more in detail. Symbol "SSi" shows a switch control
signal of the selection transistor M2, and symbol
"SDi" indicates a switch control signal of the
selection transistor M1. Also, symbol "WL" represents
5 a word line coupled to the control gate of the memory
cell MC. It should be noted that another memory mat
MML is constructed in a similar manner to that of the
above-explained memory mat MMR. It should also be
understood that a P-channel type MOS transistor is
10 illustrated by giving an arrow to a gate of a
substrate thereof in order to be discriminated from an
N-channel type MOS transistor in the drawings attached
to the specification of the present invention.

The sense latch circuit SL is constructed of a
15 static latch circuit made of a pair of CMOS inverters,
namely a circuit constituted by that an input terminal
of one CMOS inverter is coupled to an output terminal
of the other CMOS inverter. Symbols "SLR" and "SLL"
indicate one pair of input/output nodes of the sense
20 latch circuit SL. Symbols "SLP" and "SLN" represent
operation power supplies of the sense latch circuit
SL. Both a series circuit of MOS transistors M3L and
M4L, and also another series circuit of MOS
transistors M3R and M4R will constitute a column
25 switch circuit which enters data into the sense latch

circuit SL by way of a complementary signal. MOS transistors M5L and M5R selectively discharge the input/output nodes SLL and SLR.

The data latch circuit DLR is constructed of a static latch circuit made of a pair of CMOS inverters, namely a circuit constituted by that an input terminal of one CMOS inverter is coupled to an output terminal of the other CMOS inverter. Symbols "DLRR" and "DLRL" indicate one pair of input/output nodes of the data latch circuit DLR. Symbols "DLPR" and "DLNR" represent operation power supplies of the data latch circuit DLR. Both a series circuit of MOS transistors M6L and M7L, and also another series circuit of MOS transistors M6R and M7R will constitute a column switch circuit which enters data into the data latch circuit DLR by way of a complementary signal. MOS transistors M8L and M8R are transistors for selectively charging the input/output nodes DLRL and DLRR to a voltage FPC.

The data latch circuit DLL is constructed of a static latch circuit made of a pair of CMOS inverters, namely a circuit constituted by that an input terminal of one CMOS inverter is coupled to an output terminal of the other CMOS inverter. Symbols "DLLR" and "DLLL" indicate one pair of input/output nodes of the data

latch circuit DLL. Symbols "DLPL" and "DLNL" represent operation power supplies of the data latch circuit DLL. Both a series circuit of MOS transistors M9L and M10L, and also another series circuit of MOS transistors M9R and M10R will constitute a column switch circuit which enters data into the data latch circuit DLL by way of a complementary signal. MOS transistors M11L and M11R are transistors for selectively charging the input/output nodes DLLL and DLLR to a voltage FPC.

The above-described switch circuit/calculating circuit 30R is arranged by MOS transistors M20R to M25R. The MOS transistor M20R receives a voltage level of the input/output node SLR of the sense latch circuit SL at the gate thereof. When this voltage level is a high level, the voltage FPC is applied via the MOS transistor M21R to the bit line G-BLR. The supplied voltage level is determined by controlling a conductance of the MOS transistor M21R based upon the voltage level of the control signal PCR. The transistor M22R constitutes a transfer gate capable of selectively conducting both the input/output node SLR and the bit line G-BLR. The MOS transistor M23R is used to all judgment. The MOS transistors M24R and M25R are used to precharge and also discharge the bit

line G-BLR. The switch circuit/calculating circuit 30L is similarly arranged by MOS transistors M20L to M25L. It should be noted that gate control signals for the MOS transistors M20L, M22L, M24L, and M25L are
5 different from those for the MOS transistors M20R, M22R, M24R, and M25R.

The above-described switch circuit/calculating circuit 31R is arranged by MOS transistors M26R to M28R. The MOS transistor M26R receives a voltage
10 level of the input/output node DLRL of the data latch circuit DLR at the gate thereof. When this voltage level is a high level, the voltage FPC is applied via the MOS transistor M27R to the bit line G-BLR. The supplied voltage level is determined by controlling a
15 conductance of the MOS transistor M27R based upon the voltage level of the control signal PCDR. The transistor M28R constitutes a transfer gate capable of selectively conducting both the input/output node DLRL and the bit line G-BLR. The switch
20 circuit/calculating circuit 31L is similarly arranged by MOS transistors M26L to M28L. It should be noted that gate control signals for the MOS transistor M27L and M28L are different from those for the MOS transistors M27R and M28R.

25 In the circuit arrangement of Fig. 10, basic

circuit operations during the reading operation and the programming operation will now be described. For example, in Fig. 10, in the case that the reading operation in the verify operation is executed with
5 respect to the memory cell MC contained in the memory mat MMR, the set MOS transistor M5L provided on the side of the non-selected memory mat MML is brought into an ON state so as to activate the sense latch circuit SL, so that a high level is latched at the
10 input/output node SLR of this sense latch circuit SL. Then, for example, the control signal PCR is controlled to be $1\text{ V} + V_{th}$ in order to precharge the bit line G-BLR to 1 V . On the other hand, on the side of the non-selected memory mat MML, the gate voltage
15 RPCL of the MOS transistor M24L is controlled to $0.5\text{ V} + V_{th}$ so as to precharge the bit line G-BLL to 0.5 V . This voltage of 0.5 V is set to the reference level of the sense operation by the sense latch circuit SL. On the other hand, during the reading operation in
20 response to the read command, the signal RPCR on the side of the selected memory mat (MMR) is set to $1\text{ V} + V_{th}$, and also the signal RPCL on the side of the non-selected memory mat (MML) is set to $0.5\text{ V} + V_{th}$ so as to precharge the bit lines of the selected memory mat
25 side to 1 V in the batch mode, and also precharge the

bit lines of the non-selected memory mat side to 0.5 V in the batch mode. If the selected memory mat is equal to "MML" and further the non-selected memory mat is equal to "MMR", then the signal RPCR is apparently set to 0.5 V + Vth and the signal RPCL is set to 1 V + Vth. As previously explained, the precharged voltage of 0.5 V is used as the reference level. After the word line is selected, both the transfer MOS transistor M22L and the transfer MOS transistor M22R are turned ON. At this time, the sense latch circuit SL senses as to whether or not the level of the bit line G-BLR is higher than 0.5 V to latch the data read from the memory cell MC.

During the programing operation, after the program control information is latched by the sense latch circuit SL, both the gate control signals PCR and PCL of the MOS transistors M21R and M21L are controlled to high levels. As a result, the bit line coupled to the input/output node on the high level side of the sense latch circuit SL is precharged via either the MOS transistor M20R or the MOS transistor M20L to a high level. Thereafter, both the MOS transistor M22R and the MOS transistor M22L are brought into ON states, so that a voltage is applied from the power supply SLP of the sense latch circuit

SL to the bit line coupled to the input/output nodes
on the high level side of the sense latch circuit SL.
At this time, a high program voltage is being applied
to the word line of the program sector of such a
5 memory mat which is selected for the programing
operation. As a consequence, such a memory cell that
the bit line thereof is set to a low level such as the
ground voltage is to be written among the memory cells
connected to the control gate to which the program
10 voltage is applied on the side of the programing-
operation selected memory mat.

The transistors M23L and M23R are used for the
above-described all judgment. The gates of the MOS
transistors M23L and M23R are coupled to the
15 corresponding bit lines, and the sources thereof are
coupled to the ground potential. In actual, there are
provided a large number of the circuit arrangements
related to the bit lines G-BLL and G-BLR where one
sense latch circuit SL is typically arranged as a
20 center, as shown in Fig. 10. While sandwiching the
sense latch circuit SL, all of the drains of the MOS
transistors M23L located on the left side of Fig. 10
are commonly connected to a terminal ECL, and a
current will flow through this terminal ECL. This
25 current is defined in response to a condition (level)

of the left-sided bit line typically defined as the
bit line G-BLL. Similarly, while sandwiching the
sense latch circuit SL, all of the drains of the MOS
transistors M23R located on the right side of Fig. 10
5 are commonly connected to another terminal ECR, and a
current will flow through this terminal ECR. This
current is defined in response to a condition (level)
of the right-sided bit line typically defined as the
bit line G-BLR. Although not shown in this drawing, a
10 current sense type amplifier is provided. The current
type amplifier may detect as to whether or not all of
the conditions of the bit lines G-BLL (G-BLR) provided
on the left-side (right-side) of the sense latch
circuit SL are made equal to each other in response to
15 a current change in the terminal ECL (ECR). This
amplifier is employed so as to detect as to whether or
not all of the memory cells which are to be processed
by either the erase verify operation or the program
verify operation become a preselected threshold
20 voltage, namely, this amplifier is used for the all
judgment.

The structures of the memory mats MMR and MML
shown in Fig. 10 are an AND type structure. Fig. 11
shows further detailed structure of the AND type
25 memory mat. Although not shown in this drawing, the

memory cell indicated in Fig. 11 owns such a structure manufactured by a process operation with employment of two layers of metal wiring layers. A memory cell MC and selected MOS transistors M1 and M2 are formed at a position where a diffusion layer along a longitudinal direction is intersected with a control gate made of polysilicon elongated along a transverse direction. The memory cell MC of the flash memory is made of, for instance, an N-channel type MOS transistor formed on a P type substrate. The memory mat of the flash memory is not limited to the above-explained AND type memory mat, but may be manufactured by employing a NOR type memory mat shown in Fig. 12, a DiNOR type memory mat indicated in Fig. 13, a NAND type memory mat represented in Fig. 14, and an HiCR type memory mat indicated in Fig. 15. In any of these memory mat structures, the memory cells of the flash memories basically have the same structures. When the memory cells are arranged in an array shape, the features of the respective memory mats appear. Since the NOR type memory mat requires the contacts with the bit line (metal wiring layers) every memory, the occupied area can be hardly reduced. To the contrary, since the contacts with the bit lines may be arranged every block in the NAND type memory mat, the DiNOR type

memory mat, and the AND type memory mat, the occupied area can be reduced.

DETAILED PROGRAMING OPERATION

Fig. 16 is a flow chart for describing an example of programing operations designated by a first command (1FH) and a second command (40H). In this programing operation, a word line is used as one unit (namely, sector programing operation).

First, when the first command (1FH) is fetched (step S1), the next input is fetched as a sector address (step S2). An input after the sector address has been fetched is acquired as program data (step S3) until the second command (40H) is fetched (step S4). The sector address acquired at the step S2 is an X address. In response to this X address, one word line to which a high program voltage is applied is selected. The program data acquisition repeatedly executed at the step S3 is carried out in a byte unit with respect to the data latch circuits DLL and DLR while sequentially incrementing the Y-address counter 12 from the initial value thereof. For example, as indicated in Fig. 5, the program data is latched by the data latch circuit arrays DLLA and DLRA which are allocated to one pair of memory mats MML and MMR related to one sense latch circuit array SLA.

Assuming now that control gates of "n" pieces of memory cells are coupled to a single word line, n-bit program data are latched to each of the data latch circuit arrays DLLA and DLRA.

5 After the program data is latched, the "01" program process operation TS1, "00" program process operation TS2, "10" program process operation TS3, and further the erratic/disturb detection process operation TS4 are carried out.

10 As exemplified in Fig. 17, the above-described "01" program process operation TS1 corresponds to such a process operation that a threshold voltage of a memory cell MC is brought into the third program state ("01") with respect to the erase state ("11") equal to
15 one state within 4 values. In this "01" program process operation TS1, VWV 3 is employed as a program verify voltage. As schematically indicated in Fig. 16, the "01" program process operation TS1 is mainly classified into a process operation in which in
20 response to the 2-bit data of "01" latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR, program control data having an enable level is latched by the sense latch circuit SL ("01" data latching); another process operation in which in response to the latched program
25 control data having the enable level, a programming

operation corresponding to the data "01" is carried out for a memory cell transistor ("01" data programing); and furthermore another process operation in which a program verify operation by the verify voltage VWV 3 with respect to this programing operation is carried out (program verify VWV 3).

As exemplified in Fig. 18, the above-described "00" program process operation TS2 corresponds to such a process operation that a threshold voltage of a memory cell MC is brought into the second program state ("00") with respect to the erase state ("11") equal to one state within 4 values. In this "00" program process operation TS2, VWV 2 is employed as a program verify voltage. As schematically indicated in Fig. 16, this "00" program process operation TS2 is mainly classified into a process operation in which in response to the 2-bit data of "00" latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR, program control data having an enable level is latched by the sense latch circuit SL ("00" data latching); another process operation in which in response to the latched program control data having the enable level, a programing operation corresponding to the data "00" is carried out for a memory cell transistor ("00" data programing); and furthermore another process operation

in which a program verify operation by the verify voltage VWV 2 with respect to this programming operation is carried out (program verify VWV 2).

As exemplified in Fig. 19, the above-described
5 "10" program process operation TS3 corresponds to such a process operation that a threshold voltage of a memory cell MC is brought into the first program state ("10") with respect to the erase state ("11") equal to one state within 4 values. In this "10" program
10 process operation TS3, VWV 1 is employed as a program verify voltage. As schematically indicated in Fig. 16, the "10" program process operation TS3 is mainly classified into a process operation in which in response to the 2-bit data of "10" latched in the data
15 latch circuits DLL and DLR, program control data having an enable level is latched by the sense latch circuit SL ("10" data latching); another process operation in which in response to the latched program control data having the enable level, a programming
20 operation corresponding to the data "10" is carried out for a memory cell transistor ("10" data programming); and furthermore another process operation in which a program verify operation by the verify voltage VWV 1 with respect to this programming
25 operation is carried out (program verify VWV 1). It

should be understood that the above-explained program
verify voltages are determined as follows:

VWV 3 > VWV 2 > VWV 1.

Also, as exemplified in Fig. 20, the above-
5 explained erratic/disturb detection process operation
TS4 corresponds to a disturb detection process
operation ("11" word disturb detection VWDS of Fig.
16) for detecting as to whether or not a threshold
voltage of a memory cell under erase state exceeds
10 VWDS; and to such a process operation for detecting as
to whether or not the threshold voltage of the memory
cell transistor to which the data of "10" has been
written exceeds VWE 1 ("10" erratic detection VWE 1 of
Fig. 16); and also such an erratic detection process
15 operation for detecting as to whether or not the
threshold voltage of the memory cell transistor to
which the data "00" has been written exceeds VWE 2
("00" erratic detection VWE 2 of Fig. 16).

When a series of processed results obtained up to
20 the erratic/disturb detection process TS4 is normal, a
pass flag is set to the status register 180 (step S5),
and then a series of programing process operations are
accomplished (OK). To the contrary, when the
detection result obtained in the erratic/disturb
25 detection process TS4 is error, a judgment is made as

to whether or not error occurrence times reach a
preselected time (step S6). If the error occurrence
times do not reach this preselected time, then the
data of the program sector is erased (step S7), and a
5 series of programing operations is again commenced
from the "01" programing operation. While the retry
time is saved in a counter means (not shown), a check
is made as to whether or not the error occurrence
times reach a preselected time based upon the count
10 value of the counter means (step S6). When the error
occurrence times reach a preselected time, a fail flag
is set to the status register 180 (step S8), and a
series of programing process operations is ended under
abnormal condition (NG).

15 As apparent from Fig. 16, when the data
programing operation is repeatedly performed by
performing the reerasing operation, the program data
of the program sector need not be fetched. This is
because the program data for 1 sector, which has been
20 once latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR
at the previous step S3, is not electrically destroyed
even when the above-described programing process
operations TS1 to TS4 are carried out, but this
program data is still left in the data latch circuits
25 DLL and DLR.

This depends upon the above-explained latch operation control mode of the program control information with respect to the sense latch circuit SL. In other words, the program control information which should be latched by the sense latch circuit SL is produced every time the calculation with employment of the program data bit latched by the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is carried out with respect to each of the programing operations. Then, the produced program control information is latched by the sense latch circuit SL. For instance, as indicated in Fig. 6, assuming now that the program data latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is equal to "01", the "01" state corresponds to the third program state as represented in Fig. 7. In such a case that the three-divided programing operations after the erasing state are carried out in the second mode (Case 2) of Fig. 9, a calculation result is a logic value of "1", which is obtained by employing the program data ("01") of the data latch circuits DLL and DLR when the programing operation for acquiring the first programing state is performed in the first time. Similarly, a calculation result is a logic value of "1", which is obtained by employing the program data ("01") of the data latch circuits DLL and DLR when the programing operation for

acquiring the second programing state is performed in the second time. Also, a calculation result is a logic value of "0", which is obtained by employing the program data ("01") of the data latch circuits DLL and DLR when the programing operation for acquiring the third programing state is performed in the third time. Such a calculation is carried out by actuating the switch circuit/calculating circuit. As a result, only during the third programing operation, the programing high potential is applied between the drain of the memory cell transistor and the control gate thereof, so that the third program state ("01") among the four values may be realized in this memory cell transistor.

As previously explained, when the programing operation is carried out by subdividing this programing operation into three programing operations, the program data which has been latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR at the first time is not electrically destroyed, but is still maintained. This is because the following control sequence is employed. That is, the 2-bit program data latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is used to be calculated and then the calculated program data is set to the sense latch circuit SL every time the programing operation is carried out. Similarly, even in the

erratic/disturb detection process operation, since such a control sequence is employed that the calculation result obtained by employing the 2-bit program data latched by the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is set to the sense latch circuit SL every time the programing operation is carried out, the program data which has been latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR at the first time is not electrically destroyed, but is still remained.

10 It should be noted that there is a difference in the calculating methods for the process operations (data latch process operations) for latching the calculated results with employment of the 2-bit program data latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR in the sense latch circuit SL, because of a
15 relationship between the data latch process operations and the present process operations in the steps TS1 to TS4.

 Fig. 21 theoretically shows an example of
20 calculation contents of the above-explained data latch process operations. The calculation contents shown in Fig. 21 are related to sense latch data on the side of the operation-selected memory mat (namely,
 input/output node data of sense latch circuit SL on
25 the side of operation-selected memory mat). Although

the concrete calculating method will be discussed later, both the multi-sense method and the multi-power supply method may be employed. The multi-sense method corresponds to such an operation that while bit line precharge voltages are selected as three levels of 0V, 0.5V, and 1.0V, the sense operations by the sense latch circuit SL are carried out plural times so as to latch subject data into the sense latch circuit SL. The multi-power supply method corresponds to such an operation that while bit line precharge voltages are selected as four levels of 0V, 0.5V, 1.0V and 2.0V, a single sense operation by the sense latch circuit SL is carried out so as to latch subject data into the sense latch circuit SL.

In Fig. 21, symbols "A" and "B" show 2-bit program data corresponding to a single sense latch circuit SL. Concretely speaking, symbol "A" indicates an upper digit data bit latched by the data latch circuit DLL, and symbol "B" shows a lower digit data bit latched by the data latch circuit DLR. In accordance with Fig. 21, when the "01" program data latch process operation is carried out, a logic OR gating operation between the data bit A and the inverted data of the data bit B is performed; when the "00" program data latch process operation is carried

out, a logic OR gating operation between the data bit A and the data bit B is performed. Also, when the "10" program data latch process operation is carried out, a logic OR gating operation between the data bit B and the inverted data of the data bit A is performed; when the "00" erratic detection data latch process operation is carried out, a negative logic OR gating operation between the data bit A and the data bit B is performed. Also, when the "10" erratic detection data latch process operation is carried out, a logic AND gating operation between the data bit A and the inverted data of the data bit B is performed; and further when the "11" erratic detection data latch process operation is carried out, a logic AND gating operation between the data bit A and the data bit B is performed.

In the case that the calculation logic of Fig. 21 is employed, logic values of calculation results with respect to the logic values of the data bits A and B are given as shown in Fig. 22. As previously explained, the logic value "0" (namely, low level) of the sense latch data implies the application of the programing potential (program selection).

Fig. 23 is a flow chart for describing a more detailed operation of the above-described "01"

programing process operation TS1. In accordance with this flow chart, the "01" programing process operation TS1 is constituted by the data latch process S10, the "01" program bias application process S11, the program
5 verify process S12, and the all judgment process S13. In the data latch process S10, when the 2-bit program data "01" is latched in the two data latch circuits DLL and DLR corresponding thereto, a program enable bit is latched by the sense latch circuit SL, whereas
10 when the program data other than the above-described program data "01" is latched in the two data latch circuits DLL and DLR, a program disable level is latched by the sense latch circuit SL. In the "01" program bias application process S11, when a program
15 enable level is latched by the sense latch circuit SL, a high potential is required to be applied between the control gate and the bit line on the input/output node side of this enable level in the programing-operation selected memory mat. At the process step S12, the
20 verify operation based upon the program verify voltage VWV3 is carried out. At the process step S13, a judgment is made as to whether or not the all judgment result fails. When the all judgment result fails, the "01" programing process operation is returned to the
25 process step S11. When the all judgment result is

normal, the "01" programing process operation is ended. Since the calculation methods, the program bias voltages, and the program verify voltages for the data latch process operations are individually specific to the above-explained process operations TS2 and TS3, and also the schematic process sequential operations are identical to the process sequential operation of the process operation TS1 as described in the flow chart thereof, detailed process operations thereof are omitted.

Fig.24 is a flow chart for describing a detailed operation of the above-explained "10" erratic detection process operation. In accordance with this flow chart, the "10" erratic detection process operation is arranged by a data latch process S20, an erratic verify process S21, and an all judgment process S22. In the data latch process S20, a latch process operation is carried in accordance with the calculation contents shown in Fig. 21 and Fig. 22. In the erratic verify process S21, the verification is carried out as to whether or not the threshold voltage exceeds VWE 1 with respect to the memory cell transistor to which "10" program data has been written. At the process step S22, a judgment is made as to whether or not the all judgment result fails.

When the all judgment result fails, the "10" erratic detection process operation is advanced to the process step S6. When the all judgment result is normal, the "10" erratic detection process operation is ended.

5 Since the calculation methods and the program verify voltages for the data latch process operations other than the erratic/disturb detection process TS4 are individually specific thereto TS2 and TS3, and also the schematic process sequential operations are
10 identical to the process sequential operation of the "10" erratic detection process operation, detailed process operations thereof are omitted.

DATA LATCH PROCESS OPERATIONS

Fig. 25 to Fig. 30 represent an example of
15 calculating process methods of data latch process operations as typically defined in the above-explained steps S10 and S20. In these drawings, operation-selected memory mats are defined as right-sided memory mats (MMR) as viewed. Also the respective drawings,
20 as to numeral numbers expressed in correspondence with either signals or nodes indicated in each of steps, a numeral number having a decimal point implies a voltage, whereas numeral number without a decimal point implies a logic value (high level implies "1",
25 and low level implies "0"). Also, as to numeral

numbers with brackets expressed in correspondence with the data latch circuits DLL and DLR, the numeral number outside the bracket implies a logic value of a left-sided input/output node, and the numeral number
5 inside the bracket implies a logic value of a right-sided input/output node.

Referring now to Fig. 25, the "01" program data latch process operation S10 by the multi-sense method will be described in detail.

10 It is now assumed that data have been latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR. Fig. 25 represents such a case that the latched data are four different data, i.e., "01", "00", "10", and "11". At a step 2 of this drawing, the bit line G-BLL on the side
15 of the non-selected memory mat is precharged via the transistor M24L to 0.5V (a). Also, the bit line G-BLR is precharged to either 0.0V or 1.0V by employing the transistors M26R and M27R in response to the data latched by the data latch circuit DLR (b).

20 At a step 3, in accordance with the results of the above conditions (a) and (b), the sense latch circuit SL is activated to execute the sense latch operation. As a result, the right/left input/output nodes SL (L) and SL (R) of the sense latch circuit SL
25 are brought into conditions (c) and (d) shown in Fig.

25.

At a step 4, in accordance with the result of the condition (c), the voltage of the bit line G-BLL employs a voltage of (e). Also, the other bit line G-BLR is cleared to a logic value "0".

At a step 5, the transistor M26L is turned ON by the data having the logic value of "1" latched by the data latch circuit DLL, and the bit line G-BLL corresponding to the data latch circuit DLL for latching the logic value "1" is forcibly set to a low level via the transistors M27L and M26L (g). Also, both the input/output node SL (L) and the input/output node SL (R) of the sense latch circuit SL are cleared to the logic value of "0".

At a step 6, the bit line G-BLR on the side of the selected memory mat is precharged to 0.5V (i). Then, at a step 7, when the sense latch operation of the sense latch circuit SL is executed, either the input/output node SL (L) or the input/output node SL (R) on the side of the selected memory mat of the sense latch circuit SL latches the logic value of "0" only when "01" is latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (j). Fig. 38 indicates an example of operation timing of the above-described program data latch process operation.

In such a case that the latched data of the input/output node on the side of the operation-selected memory mat in the sense latch circuit SL is equal to the logic value of "0", the level at the bit line connected to this input/output node is set to 0V, and a high program potential is applied between the drain (connected to this bit line) of the memory cell transistor and the control gate thereof, so that the programing operation with respect to the memory cell transistor is carried out.

Fig. 31 shows a detailed operation of the above-described program bias application process operation S11 in the programing operation when the program bias application is commenced. Fig. 32 indicates a detailed operation of the above-explained program bias application process operation S11 in the programing operation when the program bias application is ended. In other words, a program blocking voltage is conducted to the bit line of the programing-operation non-selected memory mat. In response to the latched data of the sense latch circuit SL, the bit line on the side of the programing-operation selected memory mat is brought into either 0V or 6V, and such a high voltage as 17V is applied to the word line, so that the program operation is carried out with respect to

the memory cell transistor. After the programing operation is accomplished, the bit lines G-BLL and G-BLR are discharged. Fig. 39 shows an example of the program operation timing.

5 After the program bias has been applied, the above-explained program-verify process operation S12 is carried out. For example, as exemplified in Fig. 33, the bit line provided on the side of the programing-operation non-selected memory mat, for
10 instance, G-BLL is precharged to the reference voltage 0.5V, and also the bit line provided on the side of the programing-operation selected memory mat, for instance, G-GLR is precharged to 1.0V. Thereafter, as exemplified in Fig. 34, the word line selecting
15 operation with employment of the verify voltage is carried out. Since the word line selecting operation is performed, such a memory cell whose threshold voltage is lower than this verify voltage is turned ON, whereas such a memory cell whose threshold voltage
20 is higher than this verify voltage is turned OFF. Then, a state change caused by a change in potentials of the bit line, which is caused by the above word line selecting operation, is detected by the sense latch circuit SL (see Fig. 35). Finally, the defined
25 data is latched (see Fig. 36). Fig. 40 represents an

example of operation timing of the program
verification operation.

After the sense latch circuit SL has latched the
defined data, the above-described all judgment process
5 operation S13 is performed. In this all judgement
process operation, a check is made as to whether or
not the MOS transistor of the bit line provided on the
side of the programing-operation non-selected memory
mat, for example, the MOS transistor M23L is turned
10 ON. If there is even one memory cell transistor in
which the programing operation fails, the potentials
at both the bit line connected to this transistor and
the bit line located opposite to this bit line become
high levels, so that the transistor M23L is turned ON,
15 through which a current will flow (see Fig. 37).
While the current flows, the programing operation
fails. As previously explained, a bias voltage is
again applied to the memory cell transistor. Fig. 41
indicates an example of operation timing of the all
20 judgement process operation.

It should be noted that Fig. 26 indicates a
detailed operation of the "00" program data latch
process operation by the multi-sense method, and Fig.
27 represents a detailed operation of the "10" program
25 data latch process operation by the multi-sense

method. Also, Fig. 28 indicates a detailed operation of the "00" erratic detection data latch process operation by the multi-sense method, and Fig. 29 represents a detailed operation of the "10" erratic
5 detection data latch process operation by the multi-sense method. Also, Fig. 30 shows a detailed operation of the "11" disturb detection data latch process operation by the multi-sense method.

Precisely speaking, although concrete contents of
10 these process operations are different from the concrete content of the data latch process operation shown in Fig. 25, these process operations commonly employ the precharge operations and the sense operations. Accordingly, since the contents of these
15 process operations may be readily understood, a detailed description thereof is omitted.

Fig. 42 to Fig. 53 represent detailed operation data latch process operations in the case of the multi-power supply method. Similar to Fig. 42 to Fig.
20 47, and Fig. 25 to Fig. 30, in these drawings, program-operation selected memory mats are defined as right-sided memory mats as viewed. Also, the respective drawings, as to numeral numbers expressed in correspondence with either signals or nodes
25 indicated in each of steps, a numeral number having a

decimal point implies a voltage, whereas a numeral number without a decimal point implies a logic value (high level implies "1", and low level implies "0").

Referring now to Fig. 42, a detailed operation will be made of, for example, a "01" program data latch process operation by the multi-power supply method.

It is now assumed that data have been latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR. Fig. 42 represents such a case that the latched data are four different data, i.e., "01", "00", "10", and "11". At a step 1 of this drawing, the bit line G-BLL on the side of the non-selected memory mat is precharged via the transistor M24L to 1.0V (a). Also, the bit line G-BLR on the side of the selected memory mat is precharged via the transistor M24R to 2.0V(b).

At a step 2, the transistor M26L is turned ON by the data having the logic value of "1" latched by the data latch circuit DLL, and the bit line G-BLL corresponding to the data latch circuit DLL for latching the logic value "1" is forcibly set to a low level via the transistors M27L and M26L (c). Similarly, the transistor M26R is turned ON by the data having the logic value of "1" latched by the data latch circuit DLR, and the bit line G-BLR

corresponding to the data latch circuit DLR for latching the logic value "1" is forcibly set to a low level via the transistors M27R and M26R (d).

At a step 3, the bit line G-BLR of 0.0V is
5 precharged to 0.5V (e). Then, at a step 4, when the sense latch operation of the sense latch circuit SL is executed, either the input/output node SL (L) or the input/output node SL (R) on the side of the selected memory mat of the sense latch circuit SL latches the
10 logic value of "0" only when "01" is latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (f). Fig. 48 indicates an example of operation timing of the above-described "01" program data latch process operation. In such a case that the latched data of the
15 input/output node on the side of the operation-selected memory mat in the sense latch circuit SL is equal to the logic value of "0", the level at the bit line connected to this input/output node is set to 0V, and a high program potential is applied between the
20 drain (connected to this bit line) of the memory cell transistor and the control gate thereof, so that the programming operation with respect to the memory cell transistor is carried out.

Fig. 43 shows a detailed operation of the above-
25 described "00" program data latch process operation by

the multi-power supply method. Fig. 49 shows an example of operation waveforms of this "00" program data latch process operation. Fig. 44 represents a detailed operation of a "10" program data latch process operation by the multi-power supply method, and Fig. 50 indicates an example of operation waveforms of this "10" program data latch process operation. Also, Fig. 45 shows a detailed operation of a "00" erratic detection data latch process operation by the multi-power supply method, and Fig. 51 shows an example of operation waveforms of this "00" erratic detection data latch process operation. Fig. 46 shows a detailed operation of a "10" erratic detection data latch process operation by the multi-power supply method, and Fig. 52 shows an example of operation waveforms of this "10" erratic detection data latch process operation. Fig. 47 represents a detailed operation of a "11" disturb detection data latch process operation by the multi-power supply method, and Fig. 53 indicates an example of operation waveforms of this "11" disturb detection data latch process operation. Precisely speaking, although concrete contents of these process operations are different from the concrete content of the data latch process operation shown in Fig. 42, these process

operations commonly employ the precharge operations and the sense operations. Accordingly, since the contents of these process operations may be readily understood, a detailed description thereof is omitted.

5 Fig. 54 represents various voltage conditions with respect to the respective operation modes of the above-explained flash memory. In Fig. 54, a voltage of a word line used to read "11" data is 2.4V, a voltage of a word line used to read "10" data is 3.2V, 10 and a voltage of a word line used to read "00" data is 4.0V. Also, a voltage of a word line used to program "10" data is 15.1V, a voltage of a word line used to program "00" data is 15.8V, and a voltage of a word line used to program "01" data is 17.0V. Also, a 15 voltage of a word line used to verify "10" data is 2.8V, a voltage of a word line used to verify "00" data is 3.6V, and a voltage of a word line used to verify "01" data is 4.5V. Also, a "11" word disturb detection voltage is 2.1V, a "10" word disturb 20 detection voltage is 3.1V, and a "00" word disturb detection voltage is 3.9V.

RETRY FUNCTION AND RECOVERY FUNCTION

As apparent from the flow chart shown in Fig. 16, even when a programing operation of the above- 25 described flash memory 1 fails, the program data

appearing at this time is saved in the data latch
circuits DLL and DLR. When the flash memory 1
receives a retry program command after the failure
programing operation is accomplished, the program data
5 which has been saved in the data latch circuits DLL
and DLR can be written at an address supplied in
combination with this retry program command. In other
words, as indicated in a flow chart of Fig. 55, when a
retry program command (10H) is entered into the flash
10 memory 1 (step S30), a sector address is subsequently
entered (steps S31 and S32). Then, the program data
which has been latched in the data latch circuits DLL
and DLR is written at the entered sector address (word
line address). This data programing operation is
15 carried out within the flash memory 1 (step S33).

Also, the above-described flash memory 1 has
conducted the reprogram process operation to another
flash memory as the reprograming operation after the
programing operation failed. That is to say, as
20 indicated in a flow chart of Fig. 56, after the
programing operation has failed, when the flash memory
1 receives a recovery read command (01H) (step S40),
the program data saved in the data latch circuits DLL
and DLR can be outputted via the output buffer 15 and
25 the multiplexer 7 to the input/output terminals I/O0

to I/O7 (step S41).

Fig. 57 indicates a transition state of internal operations in the flash memory having the above-explained retry function and recovery function. When the power supply is turned ON, the flash memory is brought into a deep standby condition, and when a reset signal is negated, this flash memory is brought into a standby condition. When the flash memory is transferred from the standby condition to a chip select condition, this flash memory is brought into an output disable condition, so that the flash memory is operable in response to a command input. The command responding operations are mainly classified into a read setup, a sector erase setup, and a program setup. When an error happens to occur in the erase setup, or the program setup, this flash memory can accept a recovery read setup command and a retry program setup command.

Fig. 58 schematically represents an example of a memory card with employment of the above-described flash memory 1. A memory card 200 shown in this drawing is constituted by that a local memory 201, a memory controller 202, a buffer memory 203, and an external interface circuit 204 are packaged on a card board. A large number of the above-explained flash

memories 1 are packaged on this local memory 200. The memory controller 202 contains a control signal controller 210, an address controller 211, and a data I/O controller 212. The control signal controller 210 produces an access control signal of the flash memory 1 and also an access control signal of the buffer memory 203. The address controller 211 performs a chip selection control with respect to the flash memory 1 and the buffer memory 203. The data I/O controller 212 interface-controls data, a command, and an address with respect to the flash memory 1 and the buffer memory 203. The external interface circuit 204 owns such a structure standardized to, for instance, the PC card interface.

In Fig. 59, there is shown an example of a data processing system with employment of the above-explained flash memory 1. This data processing system of Fig. 59 owns the following different point, as compared with that of Fig. 58. The above-explained memory controller 202 is arranged as one peripheral circuit to a control bus CBUS, an address bus ABUS, and a data bus DBUS, to which either a CPU or a microprocessor 230 is connected, similar to a ROM 231 and a RAM 232.

Since the flash memory 1 owns the above-explained

retry function, either the memory controller 210 or the microprocessor 230, which controls the access operation to this flash memory 1, can readily perform the reprograming operation by changing either a
5 program address or a sector address with respect to another flash memory in which a programing operation has failed.

Also, the control apparatus can readily perform the reprograming operation with respect to another
10 flash memory other than such a flash memory that a programing operation has failed even when this control apparatus need not store thereinto the program data. This control apparatus access-controls either a memory controller of a memory card or this memory card
15 constituted by a plurality of flash memories due to this recovery function.

Fig. 60 indicates a conceptional diagram of the above-explained retry function and also of the above-described recovery function. For example, as shown in
20 Fig. 60(A), both the program data and the sector address are supplied from the buffer memory 203 to the flash memory 1 under control of the memory controller 202. As a consequence, the flash memory 1 executes such an operation for programing the data at the
25 supplied sector address. When an error happens to

occur in this programming operation, the flash memory 1 sets an error flag to the control register 180. As shown in Fig. 60(B), the error flag is transferred via the memory controller 202 to the microprocessor 230 and the like. As a result, as represented in Fig. 60(C), when a recovery command is outputted from the memory controller 202 to the flash memory 1, the flash memory 1 outputs the program data latched by the data latch circuits DLL and DLR as indicated in Fig. 60(D). Also, as shown in Fig. 60(E), when the memory controller 202 supplies both a retry program command and a sector address to the flash memory 1, as indicated in Fig. 60(F), the flash memory 1 executes the programming operation in such a manner that the program data already latched to the data latch circuits DLL and DLR is written into a newly designated sector address.

REPROGRAM FUNCTION

A reprogramming operation may be realized by that after data is erased by receiving an erase command, data is written by receiving a program command. In accordance with Fig. 3, after the erase command is performed, a program command is executed. The flash memory 1 may realize such a reprogramming process operation by using a single command, namely a

reprogram command.

Fig. 61 is a flow chart for explaining an example of a process operation by receiving a reprogram command. That is, when a first reprogram command is supplied (step S60), a sector address to be rewritten is fetched (step S61), and then data at the fetched sector address is read to be latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S62). Thereafter, the program data is acquired to the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S63). After a second reprogram command is supplied (step S64), the data of the sector designated by the above-explained reprogram sector address is erased (step S65). Next, a programing operation of the designated sector is carried out by employing the data saved in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S66). This programing operation of the designated sector is the same as that as explained in Fig. 16. While using this reprogram command, namely a single command, all of the data stored in the sector can be rewritten.

Alternatively, data stored in a portion of one sector may be rewritten by using a single command. That is, as indicated in Fig. 62, when a first reprogram command is supplied (step S70), a sector address to be rewritten is fetched (step S71), and

data is saved from a memory cell of the acquired sector address into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S72). Thereafter, such data which are continuously required from a head Y address YA(o) of the sector up to a Y address YA(k) are latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S73).

Furthermore, if necessary, such a Y address YA(m) where $k < m$ is acquired (step S74), and such data which are continuously required from the acquired Y address YA(m) up to a Y address YA(m+1) are latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S75). When a second reprogram command is supplied (step S76), the data of the sector designated by the above-explained reprogram sector address is erased. Next, a programming operation of the designated sector is carried out based upon the data latched in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S78). This programming operation of the designated sector is the same as that as explained in Fig. 16.

Alternatively, data stored in a portion of one sector may be rewritten in accordance with a flow chart as indicated in Fig. 63. That is, when a first reprogram command is supplied (step S80), a sector address to be rewritten is fetched (step S81), and data is saved from a memory cell of the acquired

sector address into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S82). Thereafter, a head Y address $YA(m)$ of the sector is fetched (step S83), and such data which are continuously required from the head Y address $YA(m)$ of the sector up to a Y address $YA(m+k)$ are latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S84). Furthermore, if necessary, such a Y address $YA(n)$ where $m+k < n$ is acquired (step S85), and such data which are continuously required from the acquired Y address $YA(n)$ up to a Y address $YA(n+1)$ are latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S86). It should be understood that the above-explained process operations defined at the steps S85 and S86 may be repeatedly performed plural times, if required.

When a second reprogram command is supplied (step S87), the data of the sector designated by the above-described reprogram sector address is erased (step S88). Next, a programming operation of the designated sector is carried out by employing the data saved in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S89). This programming operation of the designated sector is the same as that as explained in Fig. 16.

PARTIAL ERASING FUNCTION

In the case that the flash memory 1 is utilized as a file memory, a management area may be allocated

to a sector, and the remaining portion may be opened as a user area. For example, such information as reprogram times and good/fail sectors is stored into the management area, and also when a management area is erased in unit of a sector by a user, a command capable of automatically bringing a management area out of erasing is supported. This may cause the flash memory 1, and moreover the file memory to be readily used. In view of this technical point, the flash memory 1 may support the above-described partial erasing command. In other words, in the flow chart of Fig. 64 for indicating the partial erasing function, when a first partial erasing command is supplied (step S90), a sector address is acquired (step S91). Subsequently, when a second partial erasing command is supplied (step S92), data of a predetermined area (for example, management area) within a sector designated by said sector address is saved in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR corresponding to this predetermined area, and also data for instructing an erasing state is set to data latch circuits DLL and DLR corresponding to other areas within this sector (step S93). As a result, the read data is saved into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR corresponding to the management area of the designated sector, whereas

"11" data corresponding to the erasing state is set to the data latch circuits DLL and DLR corresponding to other areas of this sector. Then, after the data for the sector designated by the sector address is erased,
5 a programing operation is carried out based upon the data set to the data latch circuits DLL and DLR (step S94). It should also be noted that the programing operation of the designated sector is identical to the programing operation as explained with reference to
10 Fig. 16.

Fig. 65 and Fig. 66 schematically show a detailed overall operation of the above-described "designated sector data reading" operation defined at the step S93. The process operation indicated in Fig. 66
15 succeeds to the process operation shown in Fig. 65. In Fig. 65 and Fig. 66, numeral "1" implies such a case that a potential at a corresponding node is high, and numeral "0" implies such a case that a potential at a corresponding node is low. The process
20 operations shown in Fig. 65 and Fig. 66 are performed in such an assumption that a right-sided memory mat is an operation selected memory mat. Fig. 67 indicates relationship between word line selection levels VRW1, VRW2, VRW3 and a threshold voltage distribution.
25 These word line selection levels are used to read data

at a designated sector.

At a step 1 of Fig. 65, while the word line level is selected to be VRW1, data stored in a memory cell of a designated sector is read, and then the read data is latched to the sense latch circuit SL. At a step 2, data of a right-sided node of the sense latch circuit SL is internally transferred to the data latch circuit DLR. At a step 3, while the word line level is selected to be VRW2, data stored in a memory cell of a designated sector is read, and the read data is latched to the sense latch circuit SL. Then, at a step 3.5, data "0" is set to a right-sided input/output node of a sense latch circuit SL except for a management area selected by a Y address decoder. Then, at a step 4, data of a left-sided node of the sense latch circuit SL is internally transferred to the data latch circuit DLL. As a consequence, only a portion of the required read data can be saved in the data latch circuit DLL.

At a step 5, while the word line level is selected to be VRW3, data stored in a memory cell of a designated sector is read, and the read data is latched to the sense latch circuit SL. Then, at a step 5.5, data "1" is set to the right-sided input/output node of the sense latch circuit SL except

for the management area selected by the Y address decoder. Then, at a step 6, the data latched by the data latch circuit DLR is internally transferred via the transistor M28R to the bit line G-BLR. Then, at a
5 step 7, a right-sided bit line G-BLR corresponding to the sense latch circuit SL in which the data "1" is set to the right-sided input/output node SLR is controlled to a low level. At a step 8, the data is transferred from the sense latch circuit SL to the
10 data latch circuit DLR. As a result, the 4-value information of the read data of the designated sector is stored in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR of the management area, and data indicative of an erasing condition is stored in the data latch circuits DLL and
15 DLR corresponding to another area (namely, memory area) of the designated sector.

In accordance with the above-described flash memory, memory card, and data processing system, the below-mentioned effects can be achieved:

20 [1] The externally supplied program data is latched into the data latch circuits DLL and DLR, and a judgment is carried out as to whether or not the latched program data corresponds to which threshold value of the multi-levels every time the programming
25 operation of the plural stages is performed. Then,

the program information corresponding to this judgment result is latched into the sense latch circuit SL. In response to the program information latched in the sense latch circuit SL, the programing operation for
5 setting the threshold voltages of the multi-levels to the memory cell is carried out in a stepwise manner. As a consequence, even when the programing operation is accomplished, the program data which has been originally and externally supplied is left in the data
10 latch circuits DLL and DLR. Accordingly, even when the programing operation of the multi-levels information with respect to the memory cell MC based upon the detection result of the word disturb detecting operation, or the detector result of the
15 erratic detecting operation is again carried out, the program data is no longer again accepted from the external devices.

[2] Even when the programing operation fails, sine the program data at this time is saved in the data
20 latch circuits DLL and DLR within the flash memory, in the case that the retry program command is accepted after the failure programing operation has been accomplished, the program data already saved in the data latch circuits can be written to the address
25 supplied in connection with this retry program

command. Since the flash memory owns such a retry function, the memory controller for access-controlling this flash memory changes either the program address or the sector address with respect to the

5 semiconductor device in which the programing operation has failed, so that the memory controller can readily perform the reprograming operation.

[3] When the flash memory receives the recovery read command after the programing operation has failed,

10 this flash memory outputs the program data saved in the data latch circuits DLL and DLR to the external device. Due to this recovery function, the control apparatus can readily reprogram the same data into another flash memory other than such a flash memory

15 where the programing operation has failed. This control apparatus access-controls either the memory controller of the memory card, or the memory card constituted by the plurality of semiconductor devices.

[4] When the first reprogram command is supplied, the
20 reprogram address is fetched, and also the program data is fetched by the data latch circuit. After the second reprogram command is supplied, the area designated by the reprogram address is erased.

Subsequently, the programing operation is controlled
25 based upon the data saved in the data latch circuits.

As a result, all of the data in a sector can be rewritten by way of a single command.

[5] Since the partial erasing command is supported, the management area of the sector can be automatically
5 derived from the area to the erased.

While the present invention by the inventors has been described with reference to the various preferred embodiments in detail, the present invention is not limited to these embodiments, but may be apparently
10 modified, changed, or substituted without departing from the technical spirit and scope of the invention.

For example, the information saved in a single memory cell is not limited to 4 values, but may be more values. In such an example case that 8 values
15 are saved in a single memory cell, a total number of data latch circuits connected to bit lines may be furthermore increased. The calculation method for the data latch process operation is not limited to the above-explained calculation method, but may be
20 properly changed. Furthermore, a total number of memory mats, the programing voltage condition, the erasing voltage condition, and the verify voltage condition may be properly changed. Also, both the erasing state and the programing state may be defined
25 based upon the definition opposite to the above-

explained definition. Also, the semiconductor device according to the present invention is not limited to the memory chip such as the flash memory, but also may be widely applied to a data processing semiconductor device, or a logic operation semiconductor device such as a flash memory built-in type microcomputer. Furthermore, the present invention may be applied to an EEPROM.

The advantages achieved by the typical disclosed invention will now be simply explained as follows:

That is to say, the program data does not disappear even during the programing operation, and this program data is externally supplied to the data latch circuits in order to program the information having the multi-levels into each of the memory cells. As a consequence, even when the programing operation is accomplished, the originally and externally supplied program data is left in the data latch circuits. As a consequence, even when the programing operation of the multi-level information is retried with respect to the memory cell, the program data is no longer again received from the external circuit based on the word disturb detection result, or the erratic detection result.

Also, in such a case that the programing

operation of the multi-level information is again carried out with respect to the memory cell, the program data need not be again received from the external circuit.

5 When the programming operation has failed, the program data which has been internally saved at this failure end can be rewritten by designating another memory address.

10 Also, when the programming operation has failed, the program data obtained at this failure end can be outputted outside the flash memory.